

Meriam language

Meriam (in the language itself ***Meriam Mir***; also *Miriam*, *Meryam*, *Mer*, *Mir*, *Miriam-Mir*, etc. and *Eastern*, *Isten*, *Esten* and *Able Able*) or the **Eastern Torres Strait language** is the language of the people of the small islands of *Mer* (Murray Island), *Waier* and *Dauar*, *Erub* (Darnley Island), and *Ugar* (Stephens Island) in the eastern Torres Strait, Queensland, Australia. In the Western Torres Strait language, Kalaw Lagaw Ya, it is called *Mæyam* or *Mæyamau Ya*. It is the only Papuan language in Australian territory.

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Classification

Meriam was classified in the Eastern Trans-Fly family of the Trans–New Guinea Phylum by Stephen Wurm, who however felt that these have retained remnants of pre-Trans–New Guinea languages; this is followed by Ethnologue (2005). In 2005 Malcolm Ross concluded that the Eastern Trans-Fly languages were not part of the Trans–New Guinea phylum. R. M. W. Dixon (2002) regards claims of a relationship between the Fly River languages and Meriam as unproven, though what he bases his claim on is not clear, as Meriam Mir has a high cognacy rate with its sister languages, and a certain amount of mutual intelligibility is claimed by Meriam speakers. Mitchell finds that Meriam Mir has 78% cognates with its sister Trans-Fly Papuan languages, the remaining vocabulary being mainly of Australian origin.^[4] Such Trans-Fly cognates include personal pronouns, and verbal and nominal morphology.

Percentages of Australian, Papuan and Austronesian content
(2) = number of items; Mitchell, Holman et al. 40-word list

Source	WCL	MM
Australian	22.5% (9)	5% (2)
Papuan	22.5% (9)	62.5% (25)
Derivations/Compounds	20% (8)	17.5% (7) <div> <div></div> <div>[common to Eastern Trans-Fly 15% (6)]</div> </div>
Austronesian	12.5% (5)	2.5% (1)
More than one possible origin	15% (6)	17.5% (7)
Unclassifiable	32.5% (13)	20% (8)

Meriam M̐r and its neighbours

Meriam has around 40 percent of its vocabulary in common with its unrelated Western Torres Strait neighbour Kala Lagaw Ya, which is an Australian language.^[4] The shared words cover a wide range of semantic domains (body parts, kin, human classification, language, mythology, ceremony, artefacts, topography, natural elements, marine life, qualities, locations, directions and time), though not verbs. This latter strengthens arguments about genetic diversity, however there is still much to suggest mutual influence. The common vocabulary range from "exact cognates" to words that appear related, but have undergone semantic changes, as in the following selected from a list of 250 items (Mitchell 1995) (where exact "cognates" number 62 (24.8%), partial "cognates" 26 (10%) and "cognates" with semantic differentiation number 34 (13.7%)):

Meriam	
Eastern Torres Strait	
<i>Meriam Mir</i>	
Region	Murray Island, Torres Strait, Queensland, Australia
Ethnicity	Meriam
Native speakers	217 (2016 census) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Trans-Fly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eastern Trans-Fly<ul style="list-style-type: none">Meriam</div>
Signed forms	Eastern Torres Strait Islander Sign Language
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	ulk
Glottolog	meri1244 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/meri1244) ^[2]
AIATSIS ^[3]	Y3 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/Y3)
Linguasphere	20-00(A-a)

Exact "cognates"

WCL	MM	meaning
dhangal(a)	deger	"dugong"
bal	bar	"across/crooked"
gamu	gem	"body"
riidh(a)	lid	"bone, leaf rib"
saamu	sam	"cassowary"
thawal(a)	tawer	"coast"
gabu	geb	"cold(ness)"
ùmai	omái	"dog"
ngœnakap(u)	nerkep	"heart"
naigay(i)	naiger	"north/north-east"
wathai	watwet	"dry"

partial "cognates"

WCL	meaning	MM	meaning
dhang(a) KLY dhaanga	"edge, tooth"	deg	"edge, side"
wati	"bad, evil"	wit	"wrong doing"
mùdh(a) KLY mùðdha	"shelter, backyard, shaded place, haven"	mùd	"shade"
gœiga stem gœigœyi-	"sun, day"	gerger	"day"
wœibadh(a)	"roe" (badh(a) "food bed")	wer	"egg"
Baba, Baab(a)	"Dad, Daddy"	bab	"father"
[wœaɾ]kapu	"one (only)" (wara "one of a group, other")	kepkep	"few"
karùm(a)	"goanna; clumsiness, mistake"	karom	"black skink; clumsiness, mistake"
ngœna	"breath, intellect, memory"	ner	"breath"
kaimi; kaimel, KKY kalmel	"companionship, companion, co-"; "together, along with"	kem	"company; associative (case)"

semantic differentiation

WCL	meaning	MM	meaning
thapi	"thin piece of bark or wood, page"	tep	"fruit skin"
kapu	"prong"	kep	"arrow"
maitha	"belly"	mait	"chest"
susu	"white sap"	susu sus	"spray, foam" "white sap"
uum(a) awum(a)	"death" "mourning"	eumi (singular) baum (plural) (stem -um)	"die"
buudh(a)	"white paint" (for mourning)	bud	"mourning"
aap(a) apa-	"garden bed" "down, below, under"	sep	"earth, ground; down, below, under"
KKY, KulY kom(a) KKY, KulY kœman(a) KLY, MY-KY kœman(a)	"heat, burn" "steam" "heat, burn, steam"	kemur	"smoke" (ur "fire")
bibir(i) KLY biber(e)	"strength, power"	beber beberbeber	"weight" "heavy, weighty"

There are also various items of semantic relationship, but not formal relationship, such as WCL *puuy(i)*, MM *lu* "plant, tree; magic".

Mitchell and Piper (unpublished research notes) used the Holman et al. 40-word list below, which shows 9 (22.5%) exact items, 5 (12.5%) partial, and 3 (7.5%) semantically related words. However, this list was designed for use with Euro-Asian languages, and is perhaps somewhat inappropriate; for example, no horned animals exist, neither language has a verb 'come', and Holman et al. assume one form for 'we'; WCL has 4, and MM has 2.

PCD Proto Central-District Papuan Austronesian, PETrf Proto East Trans Fly; POC Proto Oceanic Austronesian; PP Proto Paman; PSEPap Proto South-East Papuan Austronesian [neighbouring languages noted : Papuan : Gizrra, Bine/Kunini, Wipi (Eastern Trans Fly Family), Kiwai (Trans-New Guinea Phylum), Idi, Agôb (Pahoturi family); Australian : Gudang, and the Northern Cape York Language, dialects : Wudhadhi, Atampaya, Angkamuthi, Yadhaykenu]

word	MM	Gizrra	Bine	Wipi	PETrF	Kiwai	Idi	WCL	Gud
louse	nem	ngúóm, ngóm	ngaamo, ngame, ngamwe	ngûám	*ŋamɔ	nimo	A kabana	aari (unknown origin)	aaku <i>tick</i>
two	neis	nis	neneni	nœmog cf. MM mog "piece"	*ni-[isV]	netewa, Bamu teibo	komlebe	ùka- "two" ùkasar(a) "two (only)" (-sar(a) "small number")	ilaabayu inychant ilvan ma
water (1)	gur "salt water"	-gul- "wash" bapûr- PIOb, apûr VN	atnana <i>wash VN</i>	gony "washing" imangena "swimming"	*gulV "water, swim, wash"	obo, Kope oru'o <i>wash self VN</i>	Idi tetu "wash", D bemine "sea water"	wœr-wur-uur-wœir "water"	G ungun <i>water</i>
water (2) (fresh; drink, juice)	ni	naiy, nai, nae	niye, niye	ni, niya, nyɛ́, ngi	*niya/*nayi	obo	ni	ngùki	--
ear cf. hear	laip, girip	gublang, gublam	tablamo	yɛ́piya, yɛ́pyar, yɛ́kɛ́pya, yɛ́rpya, irkɛ́pia <i>ear</i> ; yɛ́piarom, yakrom <i>outer early</i>	*ʔ(+*raamo <i>leaf</i>)	gare <i>ear</i> , sepate <i>lobe</i> , <i>external ear</i>	ran <i>ear</i> , ika <i>external ear</i> , A laandra	kaura kursai- (in compounds)	iwunya
death	eud <i>death</i> ; eumi Sg, baum PL "die"; bud "mourning"	büdül "dead", budül- "die"	budre <i>death</i> ; (w)uje <i>die</i>	budɛ́ "death"; (w)uj(e) "dead, death"	*wudi "die"	odio, P para, M uparu "dead"; orisiai, M/Kerewo oihiai "die"	kududar "die"	uum(a) "death, unconsciousness" awum(a) "mourning, wailing" (for a death) buudh(a) "white paint" (traditionally used for mourning)	ithuurra/ "dead"
I	ka	kó	cane, kane	kon	*ka(nV)	mai	ngén, A ngana	ngayi	G [ɟyuba aipaana
liver	o	konkon (puringai)	owolaamo, uweraame	wurom, vurom, sukəp, tsɛ́kɛ́p	*ɔwɔ +*raamɔ "leaf" *siba+kapu	K/Kerewo beu, M beo M siba "heart", D sibo "heart")	D yoa/siba; A zebe	siib(a) <i>liver</i> ; <i>centre</i>	iipa "hea
eye	poni (unknown origin) erkep	ilküp, ilkóküp	irecu	yɛ́r, yer "eye", yɛ́rkɛ́p, ilkɛ́p, yɛ́rtyen, yɛ́ttwin "eyeball"	*iri "see", *kapu "seed, body part, fruit, etc."	damari, Kerewo idomai	kalye, A yende "eye", ikéþ/ikapa "eye-ball" (kéþ "egg")	pùrka (unknown origin) daan(a) (<i>also</i> "pool", "life", "kernel", "shell- food") cf. -kap(u) "body part"	daanha,
hand	tag	tang, tan <i>arm</i> , <i>hand</i>	imo "hand, arm"	yɛ́m	*taanjV, *iimo "hand, arm"	K tu, Bamu tuu <i>hand, arm</i>	tang, A tranga	geth(a) (unknown origin)	arta
hear	asor-	-rrkrru-, -rrkurru-	-tecij- (-tecind- -cind-) <i>hear</i> , ătecija VN <i>hear/listen</i>	utkunj-utkund-	*Vrkundi	irovidiro, Mawata erebidiro, Kope orovidio VN	A dandarla	karnge[mɪ]-, koerngai VN; kürüsai- <i>ear</i>	?
tree (also "plant", "wood", "magic")	lu(g) "tree, plant, magic"	nugup "tree"	uli, uri "tree, plant"	wul(a), ul "tree"	*wuli, *[ɪn]ɟuɔ[p] "tree"	ota "tree, plant", Kope nu'a "tree"	lu, A ra/rati-ra/ro	<i>puuy(i)</i> , OKY <i>puuRi</i> ; yuu "spit, skewer"	puri "tree yuuku "v upiirri "m
fish	lar (unknown origin)	wapi, wapui	kibu, cupya, kopae, kopäi	kabum; waji	--	arimina/irisina <i>food, fish</i> ; Kerewo na, Kope nai <i>fish</i>	kwalba	waapi (unknown origin)	waapi
name	nei	ngi, ngui	ngi	ni, nice, nyœ	*nyilya	paina, Kerewo paena	ben, A bena	nel <i>Saibai variant</i> nei	yini
stone	bakir (unknown origin)	inglkup, inglkurp	kula, kura	gli(muz), gɛ́mo, gɛ́møkɛ́p, kula, guma, nadi, motɛ́r	*kula	kura, M nora	dadar, A dader	kùla	uulpa
tooth	tirig cf. ereg "eat" deg "edge, side"	zirgup (gup <i>body part, fruit</i> , <i>etc.</i>	giricu; cidi "edge"	orkak or- "eat", kak "bone" ďɛ́ng "thorn"	*daŋa "tooth, edge, etc."	ibuanara, Parama iawa; K iawa "incisor"	dhéndhéŋ "bite INF"; D ngui, nggoia, uguwoi "tooth"; A lenge, lenga "tooth"	dhang(a) (also "edge")	ampu
breast (cf. <i>mother</i> , <i>milk</i>)	nano ama, apu "mum, mother, aunty"	ngum, ngiam, ngüam; aip <i>mother</i>	ngaamo, nono; mago "mother", yăäye "Mum"	ngom, ngum, ngiam, ngɛ́mb, ngɛ́mdor;	*ŋaamɔ "breast, mother" *maago <i>mother</i> *susu "breast, milk"	bodoro; aida, M maramu, Bamu onoo,	ngém/nono "breast"; nene "mother"	ama "mum, mother, aunty" aapu(wa) "mother, aunt" susu (also "white	[ɟ]yuungu "breast, athiinya "mother"

	nanosus "milk" (sus "white sap", "foam")			mog, ag "mother"		Kerewo mamo <i>mother</i>		sap"; "loaf"), susuikai "milk" (ikai "juice, sap")	
path	gab	kwat, kuat	gaabo, raare	nia, nga, nyau	*gaabɔ	gabo	nyénggo	yabu, KLY yaabu	alka
you Sg	ma	ma	maane, maano	man(a)	*ma(nV)	rai	be (S/Du/PI)	KLY/KuLY/KY <i>ni</i> KKY/OKY <i>ngi</i>	(an)tuub
fire	ur	uur	ulikobo, uliobo, urikobe, ulikobe, olobo, uli, Kunini muye-uliobo	uur, [wul(a)]para	*uur[], *kɔbɔ, *pVrV "fire", *wuli "tree, wood"	era, Bamu mahi	yu	mui (Boigu,KY also mœi)	uma
tongue	werut	ulit	wätä, wärtä, warta, wate	welat, we(y)at, vlat, yat	*wiltV	watotorope, Kerewo mototobe	D dogmar, A dangamai	noei (unknown origin)	unt[h]aa
skin	gegur; tep <i>skin of</i> <i>fruit</i>	sopai, sopae; kwan, kuan <i>bark</i>	tääpo, tääpe, taape, tääpwo; uli tääpo (etc.) <i>bark</i>	gäm (one dialect gunja); wul gäm, gäm, yug <i>bark</i>	*taapi	tama	thoe	goengáw(u), KLY goengaawu, KuLY <i>goengáy(u)</i>	ikwurra s ranga <i>be</i>
night	ki	irrüb, irrub, irrib	kiye, ciye	siwiny, siwän, sowiny, sirín, sowi, tsowony, siwíng, siríng, sirím	*kiya	duo, Bamu duwo	D kuteine, A kwete	kubil (derived, kübi "charcoal")	G yulpal <i>darkness</i>
leaf	(lu)lam (lu "plant")	lam, lang (mainly compounds), pórgae-prangai, prórngae, pórngae	laamo, racme, raame	(wulce)rom (<i>wulce</i> "tree")	*laamɔ "leaf"	ota-pasa, M ota-pea (ota <i>tree</i>)	oro- popo/ru- pi/ro-rual (oro/ru/ro <i>tree</i> , <i>plant</i>); (lu)pi (lu <i>tree</i> , <i>plant</i>)	niis(a)	itrara "le
blood	mam (unknown origin)	ói, óe	uudi	wói, woj, kus, ku	*wodi	arima, Kope ora	D mem, mam, A teia	külka (unknown origin)	ichunya
horn	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
person	-am/-iam; le	-pam; pam, pama	-yame/-yamo; binamo, biname, binam; imä, im <i>male</i> , rooriye, loori "man"	-am, -iam; rîga "man, male" leo "husband"	*pyama; *[r]i[g]ɔ	dubu, Kerewo meréha; arubi,-rubi <i>people</i> , Kerewo oubi; Kope dubuiro <i>person, man</i> ; M auana <i>man</i> , didiri <i>men</i> , mere <i>male</i>	la "man"	-ig(a) personal nominaliser) mabaig(a) (<i>derived</i> , <i>lit. "walker"</i> , <i>maab(a) "walk"</i>	ama
knee (1)	kolo	--	(ngawengawe <i>elbow</i>)	kumkak, yîmkak <i>elbow</i> (kak <i>bone</i>)	*kɔɔ "knee, elbow, corner"	--	--	kulu cf. <i>kudu</i> "elbow", <i>kœru</i> "corner"	yurtu <i>elb</i>
knee (2)	kokni kok "leg joint+?" wageb "kneecap"	wagusingül, wagósingül, wagasingól	koko/coco(rar/kaako) (rare, kaako, kak, ror "bone")	kî, kîror, kum; kumop <i>knee</i> <i>ball</i> , (mop "end, head")	*kɔkɔ "leg joint"	popu <i>knee</i> , <i>elbow</i>	D tubu, tang-kum; putukupi <i>kneecap</i> ; A tran- kwimbe <i>elbow</i>	kokan(i) "kneecap"; kuku <i>inside part of</i> <i>knee</i> , <i>knee joint</i>	iingku <i>kr</i>
one/other	nerut "another" wader "some, others" (unknown origin) netat <i>one</i>	darrpan, dórpan "one, one of group" darrü "other" (+ -pan)	yepä, neetera <i>one</i> ; nuuja <i>other, another</i>	yepa <i>one</i> ; nînda <i>other</i> , <i>others, some</i> ; b'enga <i>other</i> , <i>another</i> (<i>different</i>)	*ni+[r]ɔtV <i>other</i> *[yi/dVr]pɔnV, *ni+ta[r]V "one"	ata, Bamu kaiibi <i>one</i> , <i>other</i> , nau <i>one</i>	D tupulibi	wara, war "one of group, other" (unknown origin) dhurai "some, others" wœrapùn, ùrapùn, ùrpùn (<i>older</i> waraponi) "one only" wara "one of group, other" + -pùn[i]	ipiyamar inyaanhi <i>another</i>
nose	pit "nose, beak, point (of land)"	syók	keke, cece	so, sok, sokak (kak <i>bone</i>)	?	wodi, Kope modi (cf. Bamu pito <i>hole</i>)	D murung, A wede	piti "nose" (unknown origin; buna <i>beak</i> ; nguur <i>point</i>)	iyi <i>nose</i> ,
full	(e)osmer (lit. "protrude, show self": unknown origin)	buku, iib	puuwe	ngor <i>full(ness)</i>	?	Kerewo arara'ohuai	--	1) gùdapœlam(a) (derived : "opening- SpecLOC+cause- VerbForm) (2) KLY/KuLY/MY-KY púsakar(a), cf. sakar "space"	mur[r]ku
come (1)	ta-, te-, ti-, t-	to'-, tü- t-	t- (s- allophone)	t- irrealis; ik-, -itk-, -etk-	*ta "come, approach"	-ogu-, Kerewo -	-be-	ngapa TR/INTR adverb,	impiibinfi <i>approaci</i>

				<i>come</i> , tu[ɨ]- Pl, menamena, menon <i>go</i> , <i>come</i> VN		oho-, Kope - o'u- <i>go</i> , <i>come</i>		cf. nga- 1st person, pa- <i>telic</i> , -pa <i>dative</i> bæi INTR adverb, cf. pœipai, KKY bæi "nearside"	DAT), ai <i>go</i>
come (2) (imperative)	taba (ta-ba "come-INTR"), maiem (? +ALL)	--	tădi M, tocli F	ayo	--	--	abe Sg, yebe PL; A yau	aye, KKY aya imperative adverb (Malay or similar loan : ayo, ayu)	--
star	wer	wimurr	wale, walo, gugie, griga (see <i>sun</i> , <i>day</i>)	ikui, ɨki, ɨkwi, guje (one dialect bedam)	*wa[rɨ]	gugi, M zogubo, Kope oro'i'o	D piro, A kwatai	Wœœy(i), OKY WœœRi "Venus" thithúy(i), KLY thithuuyi, OKY thithúRi; zugub(a) <i>constellation</i> , <i>significant star</i>	uunpi
hill	paser	podo <i>hill</i> , dorro <i>high ground</i>	podo, doro <i>hill</i> , doro <i>mainland</i> , <i>shore</i>	podo, dor <i>hill</i>	*pɔntɔ[r], *doro	podo, Mawata also damera; idodoro <i>cliff</i>	duidui, A pad	paad(a) (also "top, height, crest, peak "); baudhar(a) <i>mountain</i> , <i>peak</i>	pada
bone, leaf rib	lid	kus	kaako, kaake, caace <i>bone</i> ; raare <i>bone</i> , rare <i>shell</i> , <i>spoon</i>	kak, kaak, kagɨ kak, kaga <i>bone</i> , <i>stick</i> , (<i>hard</i>) <i>piece</i> , <i>stalk</i> ; ror <i>bone</i> (in compounds)	*riida/*raadi "bone, leaf rib"	soro, M kako	A kwetr/kut	riidh(a)	athirra
we inclusive	mi, mer-inclusive	mi	mine	men, mɨn	*mi(ni)	nimo, Kerewo imo [exc and inc.]	ybi	ngœba dual inclusive ngalpa plural inclusive	?
we exclusive	ki, ker-exclusive	ki	kine, cine	sɨn	*ki(ni)	nimo, Kerewo imo [exc and inc.]	bi, A ba	ngalbai, KKY ngalbe, archaic KulY ngœibai, dual exclusive ngœi, ngœlmù-, KKY/MY-KY ngœimù-, OKY ngœRi(mù-) plural exclusive	aaku
drink (verb)	iri	-(a)nan-	ene-	-ona--ena-Sg, anain-NSg	*ini/ani/ina	Kope idio <i>drink</i> , odio <i>he is drinking</i>	A ine/ngi - ni/-/na- <i>drink water</i> (-ni/na-eat)	wani- (unknown origin; derived? < wanai- "put" active stem)	ungkenk
see, find	dasmer, erdar (stem er-)	-sen- see	-păn, pan- <i>see</i> , <i>find</i> , ire <i>see</i> VN	yăi -ong- (ong <i>bite</i>), yăi -a- <i>see</i> , <i>look</i> , yeri-, yiry-, oraka VN <i>find</i> , <i>search</i> , ɨdar Sg, adar NSg <i>find</i>	*ira see	eăuri see VN	-ndee- see	iima-	angkany
new	kerkar	kûsil, kûsûl, kôsîl <i>new</i> ; kari, karian <i>little</i> , <i>small</i>	kirece, mamye, cireni, mamie-karte <i>new</i> ; matimati, matikăli, matikolă, matikola, matikari, geglo <i>little</i> , <i>small</i>	sisel, sisɨl	*kari[kari]/*kira[kira]	oliómoto	--	kayin(a)	--
dog	omai	umai, umae, ume	drenggo, drego, drengo	yongg, yongk, yongga, yangg, yoorɨnk	*omái	Kerewo kaukau, Kope umu	dréngg	ùmai	ing kud[h
sun, day	gerger "day, daylight" lim "sun"	abûs, óbûs	bimu, abeji, abweji, abuji; gugie, griga "star"	bibăr <i>day</i> , lom, lomkongga, lem kogal, ganggal <i>sun</i> (kongga, kogal "woman")	*limɔ/*lɔmi	M iwio, Parama ivio, Kerewo hewio, Kope hivio <i>sun</i> ; sai <i>day</i>	yébodh <i>sun</i>	gœiga, gœy gœyi-, gœigi-, OKY gœRigaR(i)	inga

Recent loans

The main source of loan words to the language since the mid 1800s has been Yumplatòk (Torres Strait Creole) and English. There are also some minor loans from *Lifu/Drehu*, Polynesian (in particular *Samoa*n and to a lesser extent *Rotuman*), Indonesian, Philippine, Japanese, and European origin. Many such outsiders were recruited – or in some rare cases *black-birded* – in the 19th century for pearl diving and other marine work, while others (from Lifu and Samoa) were missionaries with the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Dialects

The language is currently dialectless. However, there was once a separate dialect spoken on Erub and Ugar islands, characterised in part by the retention of phonemic distinctions between 'ng', 'g', 'n' and 'r' where these have fallen together in two ways in Meriam Mir. The sound 'ng' in Modern Meriam has become 'n' at the beginning of words and 'g' within words; 'n' in many cases has become 'r' within words. Examples are remembered in one important Erub folktale (Lawrie 1970:283–284):

Erub : **Aka nade ki andinane? Ge au?**

Mer : **Aka nade ki ardirare? Ge au?**

Where will we put it? There?

Erub : **Mena inggandane/ingandane! Keniba uzen unken a keniba imut unken.**

Mer : **Mena igardare! Keriba uzer urker a keriba imut urker.**

Keep carrying it! Our paddles and our poling poles are still strong.

The earliest records (early 19th century) of Meriam Mir included the phrase **debelang** *good taste/nice*, in present-day Meriam Mir **debe lag**. This shows that the 'ng' > 'n'/'g' change is of fairly recent date; **lang**, now **lag**, is identical to the Gizrra **lang** of the same meaning.

Phonology

Vowels

	Front	Back
High	i ⟨i⟩	u ⟨u⟩
Retracted High	ɪ ⟨i⟩⟨e⟩⟨i⟩	ʊ ⟨u⟩⟨ù⟩
Mid	e ⟨e⟩	o ⟨o⟩
Low	a, ʌ ⟨a⟩	ɔ ⟨o⟩⟨ò⟩

The sounds represented by [a] and [ʌ] are allophonic. [ʌ] appears mainly in syllables *before* the stress accent and optionally in open unstressed syllables otherwise. [a] appears in stressed syllables and in unstressed closed syllables.

For some speakers the following pairs exhibit variation, and perhaps have unidentified allophonic variation: [e] and [ɪ] (mainly Erub/Ulag), [ɪ] and [i] (mainly Mer), [u] and [ʊ], [ʊ] and [o], and [o] and [ɔ]. Older speakers appear to keep the vowels more distinct.

Consonants

		Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Alveo-Palatal	Velar
Stop	Voiceless	p	t			k
	Voiced	b		d		g
Nasal		m	n			
Fricative	Voiceless				s	
	Voiced				z	
Lateral			l			
Trill/Tap				r		
Semivowel		w			j	

Stress

Stress is contrastive in Meriam and can occur on the first or second syllable. Examples include *tábo* 'snake', *tabó* 'neck'.

Sign language

The Torres Strait Islanders have signed forms of their languages,^[5] though it is not clear from records that they are particularly well-developed compared to other Australian Aboriginal sign languages.^[6]

See also

- Torres Strait Island languages

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External links

- Opolera Wetpur (http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/PNG/meriam_hc.html) Anglican Holy Communion service in Meriam
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